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BACKGROUND PAPER
KEY NEXT STEPS ON REGIONAL REFUGEE CONFERENCE

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- The OAU and UNHCR convened a preparatory meeting of regional players and observers on January 9 in Addis Ababa to discuss the regional refugee conference which is now scheduled for February 15 - 17 in Bujumbura.
- Donor objectives for the meeting -- 1) to have the conference agenda revised so that it is more solutions and action-oriented, 2) to have the participant list trimmed back to include only those actors who can contribute to the discussion, and 3) to have a working group established which will prepare the action plan and program of assistance for the conference -- were all achieved.
- However, a significant problem arose at the prepcom meeting which is the change in the GOR position regarding the refugee conference. Acting on instruction, the GOR representative tried to obstruct all aspects of the conference--the purpose, the dates, the venue, and the specific agenda items.
- Reportedly, the GOR is increasingly feeling pressure from the French, Belgians, and neighboring countries for it to hold political reconciliation talks with former Rwandan government officials. The GOR believes that the refugee conference will force its hand on this issue in a very public arena and is therefore unwilling to participate.
- Unless the GOR can be convinced that it should seize this important opportunity and actively participate in preparations for the conference on february 15-17, the conference cannot be held. All efforts must be focused on getting the GOR to fully accept the conference objectives and the need to prepare.
- Assuming that the GOR can be turned around, ROSG members must also be actively involved in the next few weeks in helping UNHCR and the OAU prepare the plan of action and assistance which will be the main focal point for the refugee conference. An OAU/UNHCR drafting group has been formed in Addis which will prepare the first draft and circulate it to respective governments of the region and prepcom members for comments and input.
- At the prepcom meeting, in addition to our pledge of financial support for the conference (dollar amount unspecified), the Belgians, Norwegians, Swedes and Dutch also pledged unspecified amounts of financial support. Subsequently, the Canadians announced a contribution of 50,000 Canadian dollars and the Netherlands pledged \$30,000. The Belgians reportedly have announced a "ceiling" of \$75,000, depending on what other donors have come up with. UNHCR and the OAU have revised the budget downward slightly from \$304,000 to \$288,628.

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TALKING POINTS
KEY NEXT STEPS ON REGIONAL REFUGEE CONFERENCE

- We were extremely disappointed to learn at the Addis prepcom meeting on January 9, that the Government of Rwanda has apparently changed its mind regarding its willingness to participate in the regional refugee conference.
- We understand that the GOR is feeling pressured by all parties, including its neighbors hosting refugees, to enter into negotiations with former government officials. They view the refugee conference as a forum at which they will be publically pushed into a political dialogue which they are unwilling to do at this point.
- If this conference is to be held, we must all urge the GOR--in Kigali, at the UN and in our capitals--to seize this important opportunity, while the world is still focused on the region, to participate in the conference as scheduled for February 15-17 and to present an action plan which spells out the assistance needed by the GOR to move forward on repatriation and reconciliation issues.
- In the meantime, planning for the conference should go forward. In Addis, the OAU and UNHCR will be putting together a first draft of the plan of action and assistance which will serve as the basis for the conference. We should all strive to ensure that this document is practical, forward-looking and solutions oriented.
- I understand that there will be two more formal preparatory committee meetings--one in the next few weeks to discuss the OAU/UNHCR draft plan of action and one in Bujumbura from February 12-14 to finalize all the drafts prior to the submission to the ministerial/plenary session on February 15-17.
- I also understand that the latest budget for the conference is roughly \$289,000 and that the Canadians have pledged 50,000 Canadian dollars, the Dutch have pledged \$30,000 and the Belgians are considering \$75,000. The USG will announce a contribution soon. What are other Friends thinking about contributing?

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Geneva Friends of Rwanda -- Regional Refugee Conference

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